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The political parties of the country, like its other political institutions, are of little use for the problem to be considered. Their officials, committees and declared candidates are usually drawn from a number of sects. Their programmes usually contain some reference to the need of an ideal of national unity to replace existing sectarian jealousies. Sometimes like a genuine, sometimes not. Parties which emphasize Lebanese independence are most often Maronite in inspiration and membership; parties of Arab unity are similarly (though to a less extent) Moslem.

Political Conceptions

In such circumstances it is inevitable that there should exist very varying conceptions of what Lebanon is and ought to be; to a limited degree the differences in ideas correspond to differences of religious confession. Roughly it is possible to distinguish five main views of Lebanon:

(i) There are some who regard Lebanon as an integral part of Arab Asia, with no essential social or political difference from other parts and no special mission or purpose. They want Lebanon to be wholly absorbed into a Syrian or Arab State, with no autonomy but special provisions for the personal status and religious education of the minorities, such as exist in other Arab regions.

(ii) Others admit that Lebanon's past history has given it a character of its own and created a gap between it and the other Arab regions. But they deny that the distinctive character of Lebanon confers upon it special duties or a mission; they regard the special characteristics as no more than historical relics which will disappear sooner or later. They are willing to grant a certain degree of Lebanese autonomy or even complete independence, but only as a temporary expedient, with the object of shaping the lives of the minorities and gradually persuading them to accept complete union with a Syrian or Arab state.

(iii) Others again regard Lebanon as primarily a place of refuge where persecuted minorities can live in peace. They want it therefore to be wholly separate from the hinterland, and do not care what form of government exists so long as it is strong enough to protect them.

(iv) Another idea is that of Lebanon as a Mediterranean Christian country: not the western edge of the Arabic Moslem world but the eastern edge of Western Christendom. It is to